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## **YMCA Pop Warner Football**

By Barb Beckett – YMCA All Sports Program Director

It's hard to believe that in a couple of months, YMCA Pop Warner Football will officially begin its 16<sup>th</sup> season! It seems like yesterday that our youth tackle football program had its humble beginnings with just 10 teams and 120 kids. The growth has been phenomenal, as we now have close to 90 football teams, 30 cheer squads, over 200 coaches and over 2000 participants. Thirty (30) different cities throughout northern Michigan now participate. It just keeps growing and growing each year!

The objectives were very simple when forming this league. The Grand Traverse Bay YMCA and area high school coaches wanted to provide a safe, positive, and enjoyable introduction to youth tackle football. We wanted to teach the fundamental skills and strategies, all while keeping it as simple as possible. Instilling the players with the "Team" concepts and values, and working with players to develop positive values such as caring, honesty, respect, responsibility, discipline, and pride were top priorities as well.

The YMCA Pop Warner Football program currently offers two divisions in which a child can compete. The Junior Peewee Division is aimed at ages 8-10 with a weight between 60-105 pounds. 11 year olds may participate in this division if they weigh no more than 85 pounds. The Junior Midget Division is aimed at ages 10-12 with a weight between 85-135 pounds. 13 year olds may play, but may not weigh more than 115 pounds. August 1<sup>st</sup> is the cutoff date when determining a players age for the playing season.

The season parallels the high school season and runs from August to October, with each team playing 7 games, all on Saturdays. Practices are held throughout the week before the season begins and again on weekdays before playing on Saturdays. The league has a travel format and was designed to mimic the "high school" game experience, with teams travelling to other cities to participate in big game day festivities.

The 30 cities presently offering this program are Bellaire, Benzie, Boyne City, Cadillac, Central Lake, Charlevoix, East Jordan, Elk Rapids, Evart, Forest Area, Frankfort, Glen Lake, Harbor Springs, Kalkaska, Kingsley, Lake City, Ludington, Mancelona, Manistee, Manton, Marion, McBain, Mesick, Onkama, Pellston, Petoskey, Pine River, Scottville, Suttons Bay, and Traverse City. The administrative body for all of these cities is the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA in Traverse City.

A cheer program is offered in many of these cities, as well. Each week at the games, you will see large numbers of cheerleaders on the sidelines rooting for their teams.

Each association is presently doing signups. For the Traverse City association, please check out their website at [www.tcyouthfootball.org](http://www.tcyouthfootball.org)

If you have any questions, please contact Barb Beckett at the YMCA at 231-933-9622, or go to [www.ymcafootball.com](http://www.ymcafootball.com) or check the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA site at [www.gtbayymca.org](http://www.gtbayymca.org).